



# Intergenerational encounters on the metro: Young people's perspectives on social control in the media city

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## 1. Introduction

The formation of urban social order has been studied since the classic accounts of the modern city (e.g. Park, Simmel, Weber, Goffman; see also Ocejó and Tonnelat, 2014). In studies inspired by the 'mobility turn' in sociology (Brighenti, 2012, 404), public transportation has been analyzed as a space for conviviality as well as a symbolic platform for struggles and protests over space and rights, particularly for racialized minorities (Fleetwood, 2004, 36–37; Mitchell, 2003). This article studies public transport from the perspective of 15- to 17-year-olds, who are often categorized as teenagers. Their views have rarely been taken seriously when analyzing urban social order (Ocejó and Tonnelat, 2014, 494; Tironi and Palacios, 2016), hence leaving us blind to young people's everyday struggles with their entitlement to belong in the city (Maira and Soep, 2005).

With regard to young people's urban engagements, it is necessary to acknowledge the recent development and accessibility of mobile technologies and the expansion of social media platforms. Young people aged 15 to 17, the so-called Post-Millennials (also known as Generation Z or iGen, who have come of age in the first two decades of this millennium), are growing up amid ongoing, hectic change shaped by media and information technology advances. Finland, which is in focus in this article, ranks second only to Japan in terms of mobile broadband penetration (OSCE, 2017). More than 95 percent of Finns aged 16 to 24 own a smartphone (Statistics Finland, 2016a), and 92 percent of young people regularly use smartphones to play games online, listen to music and watch videos, while 89 percent use them to access social networks (compared to 9% of 65- to 74-year-olds; Statistics Finland, 2016b). Despite the widespread use of media technology, very few studies on new media have focused on young people's media consumption in relation to their mundane engagements in cities or other youth cultural contexts (Buckingham and Kehily, 2014, 10–11). In general, the implications of mobile technologies for social interaction in public places have not yet been thoroughly explored (e.g. Hampton et al., 2010).

Considering the above, this article examines the dynamics of social order in the contemporary digitalized 'media city' (Georgiou, 2013) from the perspective of young generations. Social order is formed

interactively in the everydayness of the city and through the processes of social control. By *social control*, we refer to forms of social interaction through which norms regulating human conduct are created, monitored and sanctioned. We conceptualize social control as being inherently interwoven into young people's intra- and intergenerational relations, having both formal and informal features (Honkatukia and Keskinen, 2018). In the media city in particular, social order involves technological mediation and is constituted via mundane encounters 'with social diversity in a situation of spatio-temporal proximity' (Brighenti, 2012, 46).

Empirically, we have focused on the Helsinki metro and have interviewed young people who use it daily. The metro represents for us a highly technologically driven site where Internet, digital technology and mobile devices are deeply embedded in the everyday life of the passengers (Hatuka and Toch, 2016). Moreover, the metro is a site of both formal and informal surveillance and control (CCTV, gates, security lighting; Gardner et al., 2017; Lianos, 2012). Even if formal surveillance has been intensified recently in many cities due to the securitization and militarization of social control (e.g. Hussain and Bagguley, 2012; Franko Aas, 2007, 63–65), the Helsinki metro, perhaps due to its small size and its globally remote position, lacks many of the features of formal control that characterize larger cities. In the Helsinki metro, there are no gates with mechanical barriers as there are in most other metro systems, no specially dedicated police department (unlike in Washington, D.C. or throughout the Russian metro network) and no airport-style security with metal detectors and X-ray scanners as in St. Petersburg or Moscow. In the technological and automated Helsinki metro system, social control is often manifested through informal and non-verbalized means as well as voluntary self-control of passengers, deriving either from their willingness to conform, imitation, learned routines or contagiousness of habits.

Some omnipresent tensions concerning social control become visible in the Helsinki metro due to its concentration of mechanical and digital technology in the closed spaces of stations and metro carriages (also Lianos, 2012; Zaporozhets, 2014). A specific feature of this context is that during transit, social control and norms are often negotiated in interactions with unknown people situationally and often in short-

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term encounters. Moreover, in the closed space of metro carriages moving through tunnels underground, human interaction with various technological objects (travel card readers and mechanical doors) becomes an important part of the metro experience (Lianos, 2012). Hence, metro carriages and stations are anthropological spaces for complex emotional and sensory experiences, social engagement and symbolic self-expression of which mechanical and digital devices are essential parts (e.g. Hayward, 2004).

We are interested in young people's experiences of (mainly informal) social control in this technologized context. Our inquiry assumes that young people's encounters with adults, including those encounters related to social control, bear importance for creating a sense of belonging, citizenship and being legitimate members of the city. The article will also shed light on the dynamics behind earlier research findings from Finland claiming that public transport is seen as an ambiguous space for young people. Young people's experiences of threatening situations on public transport are rather common in larger cities (Kivivuori et al., 2014; Ojanen, 2018, 26–27), and it is also common to regard the metro as the least-safe option compared to other forms of public transport in Helsinki (Tuominen et al., 2014, 36–38).

In the following section we will explore more closely the specificities of the metro as a technologized form of public transport, and present the theoretical underpinnings of the study. In the analysis of social order and control, we were inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) idea of symbolic violence (as applied by e.g. Bourgois, 2001 and Listerborn, 2015), as well as by conceptualizations of the digitalization of urban life (e.g. Hatuka and Toch, 2016; Georgiou, 2013; Brighenti, 2012; Hampton et al., 2010). This framework enables us to reflect on how everyday life experiences relate both to intergenerational power structures and the digitalization of urban spaces, and how these two intertwine. Thereafter, and based on thematic interviews conducted with a sample of young people aged 15 to 17, we will analyze their narration on encounters with adults on the metro, especially those related to social control and processes of symbolic violence. In the concluding section we reflect on the nature of the intergenerational social order in a digitalized media city based on our empirical inquiry.

## 2. The technological metro system as a site of informal social control

On the metro, one is usually unable to choose one's company or the people one is surrounded by. Events change rapidly, and interaction with others is usually brief. Compared to trams and buses, a greater number of people share the same space on the metro, multiplying the possibilities of coming across people with diverse backgrounds in a physically restricted space and often crowded conditions (Ocejo and Tonnelot, 2014; Gardner et al., 2017). With larger numbers of passengers on the metro, one is less likely to meet the same people on the same routes at the same times or to be acquainted with their habits beforehand. Due to the high level of automation and digitalization, passengers rarely encounter metro personnel or guards in Helsinki. On buses and trams, by contrast, contact between passengers and drivers is almost unavoidable. On most buses, for instance, the drivers check that every passenger who boards has paid the fare, and they can directly intervene in any situations that may occur. On the metro, formal control is mediated by technical means such as video surveillance, and there are only random checks by security workers and ticket inspectors. This setting distinguishes the metro from other forms of public transport and determines the significance of informal control, which largely rests on conventions, shared norms, expectations and negotiation. Age, gender and cultural background exert significant impacts on social order.

Accordingly, we approach the metro not only as a mechanical or technological mode of transport but also as a social, experienced and affective urban space in which digital devices, and through them virtual realities, play a part. The metro is not merely a vehicle that takes passengers from A to B, nor is a metro carriage or station merely a 'non-

place' (Augé, 1995). On the contrary, in these spaces, people gain experiences, learn about and take part in public social order and are socially, virtually and emotionally engaged (see Zaporozhets, 2014; Thibaud, 2015; Hatuka and Toch, 2016). Their experiences and emotions are deeply interwoven with interactions with other people of different ages and from diverse backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> We concur with Carina Listerborn (2015, 97), who studied veiled women's experiences in Malmö, Sweden, and who suggests that 'encounters between strangers, as different users of public spaces, are one of the core subjects for discussion in relation to orders in the public space'. Regarding the metro in particular, we align ourselves with Richard E. Ocejo and Stéphanie Tonnelat (2014, 494), who regard the metro as a unique public space in which social order is negotiated with strangers, namely those who are located spatially close but socially distant from each other (following Simmel's (1964) notion of 'the stranger' as an inherent aspect of city life). The presentation of strangeness is an essential feature in this context, involving informal norms and their guidance through social control (Ocejo and Tonnelat, 2014, 495).

We study social order and control in the highly-digitalized metro environment, which is equipped with wireless infrastructure and provides broadband Internet access to mobile devices. Tali Hatuka and Eran Toch (2016, 2195–2196) referred to the use of mobile devices as 'a portable private-personal territory', which is characterized by permeable boundaries between the private and the public or the material and the virtual in daily life places, as smartphones and devices connect their owners to multiple webs of relations. In the neo-liberal discourse, the appearance of mobile devices and new media is often celebrated as a means of making a city more accessible, flexible and smooth for its citizens, providing them with increased safety through electronic connectivity (Brighenti, 2012, 408; Hampton et al., 2010, 701–702). As alleged digital natives, young people's competencies are often believed to empower them as they are able to teach the older generations how to use the newest apps or play popular games (Giddings, 2017; Mäyrä, 2017). Not exclusively adhering to these discourses, we are interested in young people's subjective understandings of the nature of social order on the metro, which serves for us as an example of a highly technologized and digitalized social system of the media city.

We understand social control as a necessary feature of social life that makes social interaction smooth and predictable. Yet at the same time, it involves power relations and possibilities for oppression as well as conveys messages on the conditions of belonging versus exclusion (Von Scheve and Von Luede, 2005). Through addressing social control, we examine what young people's accounts about travelling on the metro reveal about their entitlements to using urban spaces (Listerborn, 2015; Maira and Soep, 2005). From this perspective, we will focus on young people's stories about their encounters with adults, primarily those encounters characterized by ambivalence, and analyze the meanings created within the framework of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourgois, 2001). Integral to the notion of symbolic violence is the premise that dominant views are perceived from a limiting perspective, which portrays social order as natural and self-evident, thereby concealing the structural power relations behind it. Our aim is to analyze personal narratives to understand the formation of the intergenerational order, to determine the role of digital devices in this context and to provide insights into young people's entitlements in the contemporary media city.

<sup>1</sup> The population diversity in Helsinki is not very extensive. In terms of ethnic composition, only 13% of residents are immigrants. The majority of the population in the capital are Lutheran, and the second largest religious group is Eastern Orthodox, representing 1.5% of the population. There is also a growing Muslim community; its size has increased from 0.4% in 2005 to 0.8% of the population in Helsinki in 2015 (City of Helsinki, 2016).

### 3. Data and methods

This study focuses on 15- to 17-year-olds, who lack many formal rights (in Finland, 18 is the age of majority and the voting age, while 15 is the minimum age of criminal responsibility and for other legal actions like concluding an employment contract) but for whom the metro provides the possibility of exploring the city independently of parents. In public discourse, the 'underaged' are commonly depicted with ambivalent perceptions as either victims or perpetrators of disruptive acts, especially in public places (e.g. Fleetwood, 2004). We are distancing the study from these depictions by carefully analyzing young people's subjective experiences of social control.

The empirical material originates from interviews conducted during the Helsinki City Youth Department project in 2016 and 2017. The City of Helsinki recruited young people for a period of one month each summer to work on an art project, *Ole hyvä Helsinki!* (You're Welcome, Helsinki!), which is part of the city's branding campaign, Brand New Helsinki (<http://brandnewhelsinki.fi/>). Young people produced art for metro stations and worked in workshops on city premises (youth centres, art centres) near several metro stations (in 2016, four groups worked on four metro stations, and in 2017, the city expanded the project to 10 stations).

A total of 31 interviews were conducted in 2016–2017 with 57 young people aged 15 to 17 using semi-structured individual or group interviews. The interviews were voluntary, and participants could choose whether they wanted to participate in a group (2–4 participants) or individually. Only a couple of the young people who had engaged in the city workshops in the centres we visited declined to participate in the study. The main themes of the interviews concerned everyday metro experiences, the use of apps and devices in transit, mobility in the city and neighbourhood identities.

The participants represented various social strata and lived in neighbourhoods near the workshops where they were working. The majority (80 percent) of workshop participants were young women, with one participant describing their gender as non-binary, while around 10 percent represented ethnic or racial minorities. By and large, groups in Helsinki city centre mostly consisted of people from middle-class backgrounds. We do not, however, regard this as a problem, considering that many previous studies on youth engagements in the urban sphere have focused on young people from working-class backgrounds (e.g. Kehily and Nayak, 2014; Skelton, 2001). The interviewees from eastern neighbourhoods, however, had more diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Narratives describing encounters with adults were extracted from the transcribed interview data, and through a process of close reading, we identified themes including stories and reflections on norms and expectations concerning young people's conduct on the metro. We also paid attention to young people's descriptions of their use of digital devices while in transit. The studied accounts represented actual examples of the formation of social order in the digitalized and technological metro setting as articulated in the participants' own words (Ocejo and Tannelat, 2014, 499–500).

### 4. Light sociality shaped by the norm of silence

In almost every interview, the participants talked about metro carriages as mundane, convivial spaces, which hosted very limited social interaction. According to the interviewees, metro carriages are silent spaces where one is not expected to make a loud noise, stare at other people or intrude into other people's personal space. This was termed 'the norm of silence' or 'light sociality' by our participants, and it has been theorized by Goffman (1963), for example, as 'civil inattention', in which the presence of others is visually acknowledged without focused interaction or verbal communication (Ocejo and Tannelat, 2014, 495, 497).

Sometimes it can be like that. For instance, you bump into a stranger, apologize, everyone smiles and then 'okay, goodbye'. Or, okay, someone dropped something, forgot something and then you kind of 'hey, you dropped your umbrella', 'okay, thanks' ... [you] don't necessarily go to talk to a stranger because you don't know whether [he/she]<sup>2</sup> wants to talk, what kind of person [he/she] is. You don't know whether [he/she] will look at you strangely if you start talking and everything ... This kind of norm of silence is very hard to break. Even if you are not afraid of embarrassing situations, somehow it does not feel natural. (Neo, 17, male)

The norm of silence, as described by Neo above, allows the passengers to be 'in their own bubble'; to lose themselves in thought, look through the window or daydream. Most of the young people we interviewed admitted to routinely entertaining themselves in their 'portable private-personal territory' (Hatuka and Toch, 2016) by scrolling social media, chatting with their friends online or watching their favourite series via streaming services. Some even related to the metro carriage as 'a space of productivity' (Hampton et al., 2010, 714), as they described how they used the metro ride for doing their homework with their devices.

Even though some young people were very critical of the extensive use of smartphones and social media in public places, many could not imagine a tedious metro journey without engaging in private activities on-screen, making visible the nature of the metro space as a media city. Sixteen-year-old Riina, for example, referred to this somewhat self-ironically as she admitted to having been 'terrified' every time her phone ran out of power on the metro. Furthermore, immersing oneself in virtual realities while travelling was sometimes portrayed as an actively chosen means of shutting out the 'background noise' in order to 'be somewhere else' – as explained by 17-year-old Aino. Hence, the young people's accounts illustrate the ways in which digital technology is explicitly used to reduce attentiveness to one's surroundings (Hatuka and Toch, 2016; Ocejo and Tannelat, 2014, 504).

Despite the strong norm of silence, most of the young people admitted that they had sometimes been approached by adults or engaged in brief exchanges with them while travelling on public transport. In the interview accounts, the adults who approached young people were either referred to as 'oldies' or 'different' in some way, such as alcoholics. By contrast, 'people like mothers with small children' or those going to work were, according to the interviewees, very task-oriented within public spaces and too preoccupied with their own matters (including their private digital bubbles) to engage in conversations.

The exchanges with 'grannies' or 'grandpas', as the older passengers were called, were often described neutrally or in positive terms as amusing encounters or pleasant chats, emphasizing the convivial nature of travelling. Similarly, listening to intoxicated adults' stories was often seen as funny and entertaining, and being drunk in public was not regarded as wrongful for the most part. By contrast, many saw substance users as an inevitable and normal feature of urban life.

In general, the young people felt that they were treated well or at least 'neutrally' on the metro compared to everyone else. Some stated that any possibly negative reactions were caused by the bad behaviour of young people themselves. Notwithstanding individualized tensions, the interviewees also challenged the strict division between their generation and adults into two, easily identifiable and inherently oppositional groups (Kallio, 2017; Fleetwood, 2004, 35; Ocejo and Tannelat, 2014, 500). Instead, a distinction was made between well- and badly-behaved people, with the latter including noisy and unruly people of different ages. This division is visible in the following account, in which the young man positions himself as an 'invisible' rider (Ocejo and Tannelat, 2014, 498), hence conforming to the atmosphere shaped by

<sup>2</sup> In Finnish, the nominative pronoun *hän* is gender-neutral and can be translated as *he* or *she* depending on the context.

civil inattention discussed above:

There are young people who behave well and there are noisy young people. [People] always look angrily at those who are very noisy. I even do it myself. As for me, no one ever looks at me. I am kind of invisible; I never cause any kind of disorder, so no one ever looks at me. (Alex, 17, male)

## 5. From sexual harassment to derogatory remarks

Aside from the emphasized neutrality of contact with adults, some more ambiguous situations with adults were mentioned, including experiences of sexual harassment, racism and being labelled negatively according to stereotypes. The civil inattention discussed above called for flexibility from passengers as well as the need to overlook norm violations on occasion (Ocejo and Tonnelat, 2014, 497), which our interviewees were aware of. At the same time, the problematic nature of this kind of overlooking was perhaps most vividly apparent when some of the young women discussed their experiences of sexual harassment on the metro. Several of them admitted to having experienced it, as explained by the following interviewee:

It was precisely on the metro where the incident occurred, and it was very distressing when someone started to follow me. He followed me for 15 minutes or so, then I kind of ... very nice [*ironical tone*], he shouted after me that I was really beautiful and everything. Yeah, those are very distressing experiences for me at least. (Minna, 17, female)

These incidents were not regarded as violence, nor were they seen as particularly scary situations – rather, they were viewed as occasions during which ‘nothing really happened’ (Stanko, 1990). As such, they were acknowledged as an inevitable part of everyday life for many girls and younger women in the city. One of the young women, for example, recalled a recent and, according to her, ‘minor’ yet irritating incident, and commented that it came to mind only because sexual harassment was discussed in the interview.

Some of the young women related how they had grown accustomed to this kind of conduct as early as age 12 or 13. The self-evident nature of the young women's experiences of sexual harassment had come as a surprise to some at first, especially when being among other people in a metro carriage is not perceived as a situation in which one would expect intrusions into bodily integrity (see also Listerborn, 2015, 110). The perpetrators were often described as middle-aged men (or those in their 30s) who were sometimes – but not always – under the influence of alcohol. They were described as looking for some sort of sexual contact with young girls. Unwanted advances consisted not only of verbalized messages or touching, but also took the form of intense staring or sexual gestures. The men's comments about beauty or good looks were generally regarded as unacceptable and unwanted as opposed to flattering.

Once I was going to school, and there [on the metro] was someone, a sort of, some guy was staring at me and smiling. And when I was about to leave, he winked at me. I just looked at him in astonishment. I was going to school! It was kind of amazing [*said ironically*], yes. (Olivia, 17, female)

Reactions to harassment and boundaries of tolerance are decidedly contextualized. Fifteen- to sixteen-year-olds are highly sensitive to harassment in urban public places – particularly on public transport and by older males (Aaltonen, 2017). However, in the social order of the metro, shaped by civil inattention and passengers' immersion in their private digital bubbles, these experiences become either invisible or tolerated. According to the interviewees, nobody intervened as a rule, and unless something very exceptional occurred, no help could be expected from fellow passengers. Hence, they emphasized that they could only rely on themselves and develop skills to cope with such situations.

The following incident was recounted by 16-year-old Ruska, who described their gender as neutral (not adhering to the strict binary division of male or female) and recalled being harassed by ‘lads’. The feeling of being left to cope alone during the incident is aptly summed up by Ruska below:

Ruska: Once, some guy just put his hand on my knee and started to move his hand, and then I kind of really hit his hand and left.

Interviewer: Well done!

Ruska: And then people sort of noticed that something had happened, but they did nothing; they kind of said nothing to this person.

Interviewer: So, no one intervened?

Ruska: No one.

In addition to sexual harassment, quite a few interviewees, regardless of gender, mentioned being accused of various issues related to their age while on the metro, such as loitering, being too noisy or too preoccupied with their gadgets, or of alleged bad behaviour in general. A frequently mentioned example was when the young people were watched to ensure that they did not occupy the priority seats (i.e. seats reserved for the disabled or elderly). These encounters were not always described as explicitly confrontational but generally consisted of angry gestures or scowls, thus making visible the norms and general attitudes towards young people in these situations (Fleetwood, 2004, 36). One of the young women said that she was always a bit paranoid about this and was constantly prepared to encounter negative comments or ‘shouting’. Hence, her strategy was to avoid carriages occupied by older passengers.

A male respondent regretted not being able to respond with a witty retort to a ‘grandpa’ accusing him of sitting in the ‘wrong seat’. This was because he had been surprised by the elderly man's reaction, particularly seeing as the carriage had been half empty at the time.

An old man came and tapped me on the back and said, ‘When you're young, it's good that you can sit [on public transport], so when you get old you'll be able to stand’. Then I asked, ‘Do you want to sit here?’ He said that he didn't. He told me to go ahead and sit if it was so important for me. In retrospect, I should have said that yes, I actually wanted to sit down. But in that kind of situation, witty replies seldom come to mind. Besides, it's probably better not to start arguing, even if it sometimes crosses your mind to answer an inappropriate comment in an equally inappropriate way. (Satoshi, 17, male)

Racist insults and comments about young people's personal style or outward appearance were also mentioned as examples of unpleasant experiences on the metro. In the following excerpt, the young woman described how she had been upset and angry about the impolite attitude of an older woman she called ‘granny’, who commented on her looks:

Once there was a granny who started to look at me in a kind way and smiled, so I smiled back. Then she suddenly said, ‘You have very ugly eyebrows; why did you paint them like that?’ Just like that; smiles politely and then simply tells me that I look ugly and to go and wipe some of it off. (Lotta, 17, female)

Outward appearance, clothes and makeup are important means of identity-building for young people (McRobbie, 1997), and while often influenced by the fashion industry, they are highly personal. Hence, comments concerning one's looks can be particularly insulting. What was even more upsetting for Lotta above was that the comments were uttered by a kind-looking person who was smiling at the same time (cf. Listerborn, 2015, 109). Later in the interview, she emphasized her attempts to make a good impression by being polite and avoiding swearing in public, and regarded the comments by the older woman as unfair in this respect, too. Like the young man above, Lotta felt unable to talk back. Responding in an impolite way would have reaffirmed the



negative stereotype of young people as troublesome, as she explained:

So, I don't really understand; you can't say 'mind your own business' or anything like that because there is still some kind of authority-politeness kind of position. I was expected to apologize for my ugly eyebrows and then leave. (Lotta, 17, female)

Based on the respondents' accounts, it can be said that young people are expected to play a part as ambassadors of youth (cf. [Listerborn, 2015](#)), which prevents them from defending themselves, as the following story by Olivia reveals:

I was walking out of the metro with friends when a very rough woman just pushed me for walking too slowly because I didn't want to push the person in front of me. I made a comment of some sort, and then she began complaining that young people are blah blah blah. That's what young people get for being nice and giving up their seats to everyone on the bus, metro and so on but still get blamed for not respecting older people. (Olivia, 17, female)

The above examples are revealing when it comes to young people's ambivalent positions in the social order of the contemporary city (see [Ocejo and Tonnelat, 2014](#), 498). Some participants described using the metro as uncomfortable and stressful because of the possibility of being treated unfairly, condescendingly or rudely by older passengers. The respondents seemed to think that a double standard exists in inter-generational relations: older people are entitled to comment on or even touch young people, but young people are expected to be well-behaved and polite towards adults (also [Listerborn, 2015](#), 108). For this reason, the participants felt that their ability to negotiate was limited, particularly with older people they encountered on the metro.

## 6. Digital means of coping

Based on the interviews, avoiding conflicts with adults seemed to be a major concern for some young people on the metro. In the context of a media city, the interviews revealed several significant patterns in this respect.

First, young women in particular seemed to use their portable devices (smartphones, headphones, tablets) not only for entertainment and communication but also to secure privacy and to claim and safeguard their personal space (see [Fleetwood, 2004](#), 38). Some referred to their gadgets or music as 'a getaway', meaning both the ability to distance oneself from one's surroundings and to protect oneself from unwanted advances, especially from adult males. The following excerpt exemplifies this:

Well, usually I travel on the metro with a phone in my hands. I listen to music or watch something, check Twitter or apps like that. So, if someone comes and actually speaks to you, some random dude, then you can just pretend that you aren't listening to him or haven't noticed him. That's what I always do. It's a kind of safety issue for me, meaning that I don't necessarily need to encounter people. (Minna, 17, female)

Second, the respondents reported that they resorted to their smartphones or other gadgets (i.e. headphones to listen to music) especially if they felt that there were potentially intrusive passengers around or if they were travelling alone. Hence, they used digital devices as part of their personal safety routines ([Stanko, 1990](#)) or 'street wisdom' ([Anderson, 1990](#)) on and around public transport. Communicating with someone (on the other end of the line), for example, was portrayed as one of the tricks young female travellers used to overcome stressful situations. This is described below by Olivia. Talking on the phone after leaving the metro station was described in her account as a safety routine that increased her confidence about travelling in public.

I use a bus line that starts outside the metro station. One Saturday evening at the bus stop, I realized that a man was staring at me. I

thought, okay, now [I] should do something, and I decided to call a friend. I talked to her during the entire bus trip home. I felt safer since I could not have been attacked while on the phone, especially seeing as I told my friend where I was and some other general information just to be on the safe side. (Olivia, 17, female)

Considering the data, it seems that the young women's digitalized coping mechanisms were individualistic, as they were adopted in an atmosphere shaped by civil inattention and the travellers' general immersion in their private digital bubbles. However, in some accounts, digital devices were connected to safety in a more communitarian way, as some young women emphasized their habits of looking after one another and making sure that friends arrived safely at their destinations when travelling later in the evening.

Third, digital devices were used by young people as shields against the adult gaze and for minimizing the opportunities for interaction with them out of fear of negative comments related to their youth. This is described by 17-year-old Lotta and Veera in the following exchange. For them, engagement in their private digital bubbles gave an impression of business as opposed to loitering, which, they claim, young people are often accused of.

Lotta: Yes, it is kind of strange; when you are my age, whatever you do is just loitering. Like, if I'm waiting for public transport or waiting for a friend downtown, I always try to look terribly busy so that people would not get an impression that I'm just hanging around there.

Veera: In that situation I usually grab my phone and pretend to be scrolling something [...]

Interviewer: [...] You said that you take your mobile out and then what do you do?

Veera: Well, I go to Instagram. Even if I have already seen all the feeds many times, I go there again in the desperate hope that there will be something new, please, anything new.

Fourth, regarding the technologized metro system, many of the young people we interviewed had expectations of safety from the representatives of formal control, such as security guards. Despite sometimes being viewed as possessing stereotypical views of young people (see also [Saarikkomäki, 2017](#)), they were nevertheless regarded as safe adults, sources of help and advice and professionals with official rights to maintain public safety, thereby representing protective and caring forms of social control for young people. However, in the digitalized metro system, which is in itself effective in following passengers everywhere ([Brighenti, 2012](#), 410), one quite rarely encounters such safe adults and cannot expect help from CCTV cameras, as was pointed out by our interviewees. Also, some respondents felt that security personnel had disregarded or overlooked their safety needs on the metro. When asked what they would like to change in the Helsinki metro system, interviewees most commonly mentioned that they wished to see more security guards in metro carriages and stations, especially in the evening and at night.

## 7. Ambivalent encounters as symbolic violence

As previously mentioned, it was common for the young people we interviewed to portray metro carriages and stations as neutral spaces with limited social interaction with unknown people ([Goffman, 1963](#); [Augé, 1995](#)), and the tendency for passengers to be in their private digital bubbles during the metro ride. We have, however, also documented another side to this story, describing young people's recollections of mundane but ambivalent encounters in which they felt that their presence on the metro was monitored or challenged by older generations. Depending on the young person in question, these experiences were either seen as isolated incidents or as common features of public transport. Hence, these experiences were not unitary, and

their meanings varied depending on contextual factors.

Despite this variability, the ways in which the interviewees made sense of their experiences can be interpreted in line with conceptualizations of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourgois, 2001). Accordingly, sexual harassment, for example in the form of gestures or staring, makes young women in particular conscious of their visibility and vulnerability on the metro. They learn to view themselves as self-evident and natural objects of harassment, especially when performing idealized femininity. They also learn that, as young women, they are expected to cope with harassment by themselves and to put up with it without making a big issue of it. What they do not recognize, however, are the unobserved structural or cultural mechanisms behind the objectifying practices (Bourgois, 2001). At worst, if something happens, the young women might end up blaming themselves for not having been cautious enough (Pedersen, 2009). While some seemed confident about their coping strategies and cleverly used technological means to facilitate them, others talked openly about their fears and worries concerning their personal safety. The possibility of sexual violence was discussed in some interviews, illustrating the continuum of sexual violence in the consciousness of at least some young women (Kelly, 1987).

Similarly, experiences of being labelled as misbehaving youngsters can be interpreted as a form of symbolic violence. The participants seemed to have internalized the fact that they could be confronted as representatives of the 'troublesome' young generation when they travel in the city. They did not usually portray themselves as victims of these utterances but were nevertheless irritated that they did not have sensible means of talking back. Experiencing negative reactions can negatively affect their trust in adults and their confidence while travelling in the public sphere (Listerborn, 2015, 109).

Based on the interviews, it can be said that the mundane nature of these experiences disguises the intergenerational power relations that are reproduced in them and that portray young people as immature, deficient and of less worth than adults. The acts giving rise to ambivalent emotions are not overt violence but often mundane experiences – situations which may not even be noticed by other passengers often engaged in their own virtual networks. The rude comments are based on the negative imaginaries of youth, claiming that young people are in need of education, discipline or adult guidance. The older people's conduct towards young people can therefore reflect their genuine fear of youth, which they feel safe uttering only in certain situations. Despite this, many young people regard this kind of treatment as insulting as it affronts their dignity as people and categorizes them as deviant youth. When allowed to continue without intervention, the negative imagines are reproduced, and both the older people who intrude into young people's privacy and the adults who remain passive bystanders operate in ways that fail to recognize the harmful consequences of their actions for young people as users of public transport (Cooper, 2012, 66). As such, they take part in forming a social order of discriminating patterns that might restrict young people's movements in the city (Listerborn, 2015, 106–108).

## 8. Conclusions: ambivalent entitlements shaped by digital bubbles

Intergenerational interaction in the Helsinki metro seems to be characterized by young people's expectations of conviviality and travelling in their private digital 'bubbles' on the one hand, and confusion concerning their position on the other. They feel that they are required to act like adults, yet they must be prepared to be treated like children without rights, targets of sexual harassment or intrusive comments, or problematic kids who should be disciplined or given advice on how to behave or look. In other words, young people feel that they are expected to behave well, which does not, however, preclude adversarial encounters with adults. These experiences may arouse feelings of alienation in the urban public realm, as this condition is often viewed as a self-evident reality that young people feel they must adjust to without

many opportunities for change.

It is notable that the characteristics of social order that we have analyzed here as symbolic violence are formed in the metro system of Helsinki, which lacks many features of formal surveillance that exist in larger cities, and where social control mainly entails informal interaction between strangers. Moreover, the Helsinki metro sociality is characterized by widespread use of digital devices.

Based on our analysis, we claim that the neoliberal discourses emphasizing the positive aspects of digitalization on urban sociability (see e.g. Hampton et al., 2010) disregard other, more complex impacts related to intensified use of digital technology in public spaces. Digital technology is documented to have created, in addition to new opportunities for city dwellers, new automated forms of control involving discriminatory restrictions of freedom of movement (Brighenti, 2012, 408; Graham and Wood, 2003). In addition, as we argue here, the contemporary mediatized and digitalized metro sociality might contribute to the constitution of an oppressive intergenerational order in the public sphere in which young people are relegated to subordinated positions and treated according to stereotypical depictions.

This is made possible by the young and middle-aged passengers' extensive immersion in their digital bubbles when travelling on the metro. Aside from the narratives of our respondents, it is easy to observe that this is a general mode of conduct on public transport, especially on the metro. Based on the narration of the participants in this study and on observations in earlier studies (e.g. Hatuka and Toch, 2016; Hampton et al., 2010), it can be claimed that the travellers' extensive immersion in their 'portable private-personal territories' decreases their attentiveness to social surroundings and less familiar people. It also seems to reduce the general preparedness of passengers to intervene in problematic situations between generations, which, according to the interviewees, have occurred between them and adults who are 'older' or somehow 'different' from busy, task-oriented adults.

Secondly, young women in particular have adopted mobile technology as part of their personal safety routines. In that sense, it can be argued that digitalization has increased their feelings of safety in their personal space amid strangers (Hatuka and Toch, 2016, 2203–2204). Yet simultaneously, as they expect no support from their fellow passengers, despite the existence of mobile technology, they still feel vulnerable and talk about coping mainly as their own responsibility.

The implications of mobile technology for social relations in the urban sphere are hence ambiguous. The digital revolution has not only liberated teenagers to explore the media city on their own terms, but internet connectivity and portable digital devices are also involved in processes based on stereotypical imaginaries of youth, which can have harmful consequences for young people's capacities to use city spaces. The persistence of these perceptions is of course only one aspect of the lived realities of young people in urban spheres. Nonetheless, if not problematized, their continued use will restrict young people's opportunities to relate to the media city as a safe place to explore.

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## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2018.10.001>.

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